

# Prime Minister announces national Lockdown

The Prime Minister has announced a national lockdown and instructed people to stay at home to control the virus, protect the NHS and save lives.

The decision follows a rapid rise in infections, hospital admissions and case rates across the country, and our hospitals are now under more pressure than they have been at any other point throughout the pandemic.

This drastic jump in cases has been attributed to the new variant of COVID-19, which our scientists have now confirmed is between 50 and 70 per cent more transmissible.

On 4 January, there were 26,626 Covid patients in hospital in England, an increase of over 30% in one week, and the April 2020 hospital admissions peak has now been surpassed by 40%.

The case rate in England up to 29 December was 478.5 per 100k, three times higher than on 1 December when the case rate was 151.3.

On 3 Jan, 454 deaths were reported, with 4,228 over the last 7 days – a 24% increase on the previous 7 days.

This afternoon, the four UK Chief Medical Officers have advised that the COVID threat level should move from level four to level five, indicating that if action is not taken NHS capacity may be overwhelmed within 21 days.

The Prime Minister praised everyone's collective efforts to get this virus under control, emphasising the great national effort to fight Covid. Despite this, the pressure on our NHS, rapidly rising infection rates and hospital admissions due to the new variant mean that another national lockdown is sadly necessary.

From tomorrow, people will only be allowed to leave their homes for the following reasons:

- shop for basic necessities, for you or a vulnerable person.
- go to work, or provide voluntary or charitable services, if you cannot reasonably do so from home.
- exercise with your household (or support bubble) or one other person, this should be limited to once per day, and you should not travel outside your local area.
- meet your support bubble or childcare bubble where necessary, but only if you are legally permitted to form one.
- seek medical assistance or avoid injury, illness or risk of harm (including domestic abuse).
- attend education or childcare – for those eligible.

From tomorrow, all primary schools, secondary schools and colleges will move

to remote learning, except for the children of key workers and vulnerable children. While children are still very unlikely to be severely affected by COVID-19, the government recognises that schools must be included in the restrictions in order to have the best chance of getting the virus under control as schools can act as vectors of transmission, causing the virus to spread between households when rates are high.

Schools will be required to provide remote education for those learning at home.

Early years settings such as nurseries, alternative provision and special schools will remain open and vulnerable children and children of critical workers can continue to use registered childcare, childminders and other childcare activities.

The government is also advising the clinically extremely vulnerable to begin shielding again, and letters will be sent to individuals with advice on what this means for them.

All non-essential retail, hospitality and personal care services must close, or remain closed. Restaurants can continue delivery, takeaway or click-and-collect of food and non-alcoholic drinks, but venues will no longer be able to serve takeaway or click-and-collect alcohol.

Essential shops and garden centres can remain open. Entertainment venues and animal attractions such as zoos must close, but the outdoor areas of venues such as heritage homes and botanical gardens can remain open, to be used for exercise. Playgrounds may also remain open.

Places of worship can also remain open, but you may only visit with your household.

Indoor and outdoor sports facilities including sports courts, gyms, golf courses, swimming pools, and riding arenas must also close. Elite sport and disabled sport can continue, as can PE lessons for those children attending school.

The restrictions will come into effect tomorrow, and are expected to last until the middle of February if the situation in hospitals improve. By this point, the NHS hopes to have vaccinated everyone in the top four priority groups identified by the JCVI – including older care home residents and staff, everyone over 70, all frontline NHS and care staff and all those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

Vaccinating the most vulnerable will protect those at highest risk from COVID-19 and this will remove a significant amount of the pressure currently facing the NHS.

Based on the latest available data, the UK has vaccinated more people than the rest of Europe combined and we will continue to accelerate our vaccination programme at pace.

Everyone should follow the new rules from now, and they will become law from

00.01 on Wednesday. Parliament will sit, largely remotely, on Wednesday to debate and vote on the measures.

The full details on what you can and cannot do are available [here](#).

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## [Prime Minister's address to the nation: 4 January 2021](#)

Since the pandemic began last year, the whole United Kingdom has been engaged in a great national effort to fight Covid.

And there is no doubt that in fighting the old variant of the virus, our collective efforts were working and would have continued to work.

But we now have a new variant of the virus. It has been both frustrating and alarming to see the speed with which the new variant is spreading.

Our scientists have confirmed this new variant is between 50 and 70 per cent more transmissible – that means you are much, much more likely to catch the virus and to pass it on.

As I speak to you tonight, our hospitals are under more pressure from Covid than at any time since the start of the pandemic.

In England alone, the number of Covid patients in hospitals has increased by nearly a third in the last week, to almost 27,000.

That number is 40 per cent higher than the first peak in April.

On 29 December, more than 80,000 people tested positive for Covid across the UK – a new record.

The number of deaths is up by 20 per cent over the last week and will sadly rise further. My thoughts are with all those who have lost loved ones.

With most of the country already under extreme measures, it is clear that we need to do more, together, to bring this new variant under control while our vaccines are rolled out.

In England, we must therefore go into a national lockdown which is tough enough to contain this variant.

That means the Government is once again instructing you to stay at home.

You may only leave home for limited reasons permitted in law, such as to shop for essentials, to work if you absolutely cannot work from home, to exercise, to seek medical assistance such as getting a Covid test, or to escape

domestic abuse.

The full details on what you can and can't do will be available at [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus).

If you are clinically extremely vulnerable, we are advising you to begin shielding again and you will shortly receive a letter about what this means for you.

And because we now have to do everything we possibly can to stop the spread of the disease, primary schools, secondary schools and colleges across England must move to remote provision from tomorrow, except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Everyone will still be able to access early years settings such as nurseries.

We recognise that this will mean it is not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal. The Education Secretary will work with Ofqual to put in place alternative arrangements.

We will provide extra support to ensure that pupils entitled to free school meals will continue to receive them while schools are closed, and we'll distribute more devices to support remote education.

I completely understand the inconvenience and distress this late change will cause millions of parents and pupils up and down the country.

Parents whose children were in school today may reasonably ask why we did not take this decision sooner.

The answer is simply that we have been doing everything in our power to keep schools open, because we know how important each day in education is to children's life chances.

And I want to stress that the problem is not that schools are unsafe for children – children are still very unlikely to be severely affected by even the new variant of Covid.

The problem is that schools may nonetheless act as vectors for transmission, causing the virus to spread between households.

Today the United Kingdom's Chief Medical Officers have advised that the country should move to alert level 5, meaning that if action is not taken NHS capacity may be overwhelmed within 21 days.

Of course, there is one huge difference compared to last year.

We are now rolling out the biggest vaccination programme in our history.

So far, we in the UK have vaccinated more people than the rest of Europe combined.

With the arrival today of the UK's own Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine, the pace

of vaccination is accelerating.

I can share with you tonight the NHS's realistic expectations for the vaccination programme in the coming weeks.

By the middle of February, if things go well and with a fair wind in our sails, we expect to have offered the first vaccine dose to everyone in the four top priority groups identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

That means vaccinating all residents in a care home for older adults and their carers, everyone over the age of 70, all frontline health and social care workers, and everyone who is clinically extremely vulnerable.

If we succeed in vaccinating all those groups, we will have removed huge numbers of people from the path of the virus.

And of course, that will eventually enable us to lift many of the restrictions we have endured for so long.

I must stress that even if we achieve this goal, there remains a time lag of two to three weeks from getting a jab to receiving immunity.

And there will be a further time lag before the pressure on the NHS is lifted.

So we should remain cautious about the timetable ahead.

But if our understanding of the virus doesn't change dramatically once again...

If the rollout of the vaccine programme continues to be successful...

If deaths start to fall as the vaccine takes effect...

And, critically, if everyone plays their part by following the rules...

Then I hope we can steadily move out of lockdown, reopening schools after the February half term and starting, cautiously, to move regions down the tiers.

I want to say to everyone right across the United Kingdom that I know how tough this is, I know how frustrated you are, I know that you have had more than enough of government guidance about defeating this virus.

But now more than ever, we must pull together.

You should follow the new rules from now, and they will become law in the early hours of Wednesday morning. Parliament will meet – largely remotely – later that day.

I know that the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland share my conviction this is a pivotal moment and they're taking similar steps.

The weeks ahead will be the hardest yet but I really do believe that we are

entering the last phase of the struggle.

Because with every jab that goes into our arms, we are tilting the odds against Covid and in favour of the British people.

And, thanks to the miracle of science, not only is the end in sight and we know exactly how we will get there.

But for now, I am afraid, you must once again stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

Thank you all very much.

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## [Improvements to Ironbridge flood defences reduce risk of flooding](#)

[Ironbridge](#) in Shropshire has been made more resilient to flooding following a review of the issues faced in the February 2020 floods.

The review has led to improvements to the method of deploying the town's temporary flood defence scheme.

The new method was put to the test before Christmas when the [Environment Agency](#) erected the flood defence due to the high river level and the [flood warnings](#) that were in place. The barriers were taken down on 29 December, once it was safe to do so.

To further reduce the risk of flooding from the River Severn, work to the road surface by [Telford and Wrekin Council](#) will improve the ground conditions for the temporary flood barrier that is deployed in the event of flooding, and ensure it does not move.

The work by Telford and Wrekin Council is due to start on 18 January 2021 unless adverse weather dictates otherwise. [Road closures](#) will be in place until the work is due for completion on 7 February 2021.

In the floods of February 2020, Ironbridge experienced the highest river levels since the year 2000. Numerous flood warnings, including two severe flood warnings, were issued for the River Severn at the Wharfage, Ironbridge, and Environment Agency temporary barriers were deployed.

With river levels at the highest ever against the barriers, there was some slippage on the road surface which caused seepage behind the barrier due to the force of the water. Pumps were used to manage surface water and the seepage behind the flood defence.

Despite the prolonged high river levels, the barrier continued to hold back

the river levels. Once the levels had peaked, Environment Agency staff completed repairs to the damaged barrier to ensure it provided protection over the following weeks.

Adam Lines, area environment manager at the Environment Agency, said:

While the temporary flood barriers at Ironbridge continued to be operational and properties were defended in the February floods, we have reviewed and improved their method of deployment, which we adopted in the erection of the barriers in December.

These measures include the way we put the barriers in place to allow for a wider waterproof membrane to the front of the barriers, which increases protection. We have also reviewed how we can make them even better secured, particularly around trees; and how the road can be adapted to reduce the chance of movement of the barrier.

Changes have also been made to the deployment plan that the Environment Agency and Telford and Wrekin Council follow in putting the barrier in place and we will increase the time needed to fully install the barrier to allow for the additional work.

Councillor David Wright, Telford and Wrekin Council's cabinet member with responsibility for flood management, said:

Since the floods last winter, we have done a lot of work with the Environment Agency to produce this bespoke and innovative road design specifically for Ironbridge. Many surveys were done by both our organisations, leading to 3D designs and investigative work on how we can minimise the risk of the flood barriers being moved again by force of a flooded River Severn. It led to identifying new ways for the Environment Agency to put the barriers in place, especially around trees.

The Wharfage will be resurfaced by Telford and Wrekin Council's highways contractor Balfour Beatty with a new material to improve friction. When laid, the new road surface will be designed flatter and slightly sloping towards the river to further reduce the risk of any slippage by the barriers.

We are now turning those designs into reality as quickly as we can and that is why this work is being done during the winter. I would like to reassure residents and businesses in Ironbridge that there are contingency plans in place to deal with any increase in the river level; plans which we already put into practice last month. It is important to note that is impossible to completely eliminate flood risk, however we are doing everything we can to

minimise that risk.

[Check online](#) if your property, business, or place of work is within a flood warning area or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

## Background

- The temporary flood defence barrier in Ironbridge was in use in December 2020 due to flood warnings being in place. It was fully functional despite the road surface works having not yet been carried out.
- In February 2020, Environment Secretary George Eustice visited Ironbridge to meet with residents and businesses. He thanked Environment Agency staff and emergency responders who were working 24/7 to reduce flood risk to communities.
- 2019 was the wettest autumn on record, and February 2020 was the wettest February on record, with some places receiving four times their average rainfall.
- Over the course of last winter, Environment Agency flood defences protected almost 130,000 properties, with around 8,000 properties sadly being flooded.
- Since 2015, the Environment Agency has been investing £2.6bn to better protect the country from flooding and coastal erosion. We are on course to have better protected 300,000 homes by March 2021.
- In 2020, the government announced a record £5.2 billion investment in flood and coastal defences – double the previous investment – to protect 336,000 properties, and the Environment Agency's [Flood and Coast Erosion Risk Management Strategy](#), will prepare the country for more extreme weather and build a better prepared and more resilient nation.
- In July 2020, [the government announced an additional £170m](#) to accelerate the construction of flood defence projects in 2020 and 2021, where they would drive growth and benefit local economies.

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## [COVID-19 alert level: update from the UK Chief Medical Officers](#)

News story

A joint statement from the UK Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) recommending that the UK COVID-19 alert level move from level 4 to level 5.



Following advice from the Joint Biosecurity Centre and in the light of the most recent data, the 4 UK Chief Medical Officers and NHS England Medical Director recommend that the UK alert level should move from level 4 to level 5.

Many parts of the health systems in the 4 nations are already under immense pressure. There are currently very high rates of community transmission, with substantial numbers of COVID patients in hospitals and in intensive care.

Cases are rising almost everywhere, in much of the country driven by the new more transmissible variant. We are not confident that the NHS can handle a further sustained rise in cases and without further action there is a material risk of the NHS in several areas being overwhelmed over the next 21 days.

Although the NHS is under immense pressure, significant changes have been made so people can still receive lifesaving treatment. It is absolutely critical that people still come forward for emergency care. If you require non-urgent medical attention, please contact your GP or call NHS 111.

Chief Medical Officer for England, Professor Chris Whitty

Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton

Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, Dr Gregor Smith

Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland, Dr Michael McBride

NHS England, National Medical Director Professor Stephen Powis

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# Increasing the level of coordination in offshore electricity infrastructure: BEIS and Ofgem open letter

This letter sets out the actions the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Ofgem are taking to increase the level of coordination in offshore transmission infrastructure, and calls for views to support the [Offshore transmission network review](#) which launched in July 2020.

We would particularly welcome views from those who are already pursuing some level of coordination or have identified an opportunity to do so, at a local, national or international level. This could include considering anticipatory investment in one project to enable a future project, or combining offshore wind and interconnector assets.

Ofgem and BEIS will use this information to:

- capitalise on early opportunities that will deliver benefits for consumers and the wider energy system
- inform future policy development relating to an enduring regime for connections post 2030