

Boris Johnson adopts cautious approach to second UK coronavirus lockdown



U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson | Leon Neal/Getty Images

Pubs and restaurants will be forced to close at 10 p.m. and people will be encouraged to work from home under new restrictions announced Tuesday.

LONDON — Boris Johnson took a softly-softly approach to the second nationwide coronavirus lockdown in the U.K.

The prime minister on Wednesday unveiled a range of measures for England in a bid to stem the rising COVID-19 case rate, but held back from imposing sweeping restrictions to keep people at home, as was the case at the height of the first wave.

Johnson said pubs, bars, restaurants and other hospitality venues in England must close at 10 p.m. from Thursday, while venues will be forced by law to provide table service.

The government also ditched its attempts to encourage workers back to their offices, instead telling them to work from home if possible with immediate effect. The move marks a significant U-turn after ministers previously insisted staff should return to their desks.

Johnson told the House of Commons that Britain had reached a “perilous turning point” toward a second wave of the virus but said “we are acting on the principle that a stitch in time saves nine.”

There are fears in the food and drink industry that the new measures for hospitality could lead to hundreds of thousands of job losses.

He said that without a breakthrough in treatments or a vaccination, the new

measures could be in place for around six months, but he warned that harsher measures could yet be imposed if the virus continues to spread quickly.

“I must emphasize, that if all our actions fail to bring the [reproduction] number below one, then we reserve the right to deploy greater firepower with significantly greater restrictions,” he told MPs. “I fervently want to avoid taking this step, as do the devolved administrations, but we will only be able to avoid it if our new measures work and our behavior changes.”

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