

UK death toll hits 100,000 as Johnson locks down to March

Starmer claims fatalities caused by the government's 'huge' mistakes.



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announces new lockdown measures in the UK parliament. Photo: House of Commons/PA Wire

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson put England on notice that the national lockdown will continue for at least another six weeks, with schools staying closed and new border quarantine rules coming into force.

A day after the British death toll passed 100,000, Mr Johnson said his government will review the impact of pandemic measures and the effectiveness of the vaccine programme in mid-February.

But the soonest restrictions could begin to be eased and schools fully reopened is March 8, he said, and some rules will be tightened.

In an attempt to stop dangerous mutant strains of the virus entering the UK, new 10-day hotel quarantine measures will be imposed on all passengers arriving from Covid hot spots such as South America, South Africa and Portugal.



'It wasn't bad luck': Labour leader Keir Starmer. Photo: House of Commons/PA

"Everyone yearns to know how much longer we must endure these restrictions, with all their consequences for jobs, livelihoods and most tragically of all, the life chances of our children," Mr Johnson told Parliament. "We will not persist for a day longer than is necessary, but nor can we relax too soon."

"We have one of the highest death rates in the world," said Labour Party and

opposition leader Keir Starmer. “The truth is this was not inevitable, it wasn’t just bad luck. It’s the result of a huge number of mistakes by the prime minister during the course of this pandemic.”

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Mr Johnson rejected a call from Tory colleague Steve Brine to consider opening some schools before March 8. “This is about as fast as we think we can prudently go,” the prime minister said. While the lockdown appears to have curbed the spread of infections, “we do not yet have enough data to know exactly how soon it will be safe to reopen our society and economy,” he said.

The UK is three weeks into its third national lockdown, with tens of millions of workers ordered to stay home. Since then, the government has committed almost £300bn (€340bn) to emergency support for the economy.

Britain has suffered the fifth-highest death toll in the world and the heaviest economic hit of any G7 nation.

In recent weeks, Mr Johnson’s administration has focused on a mass vaccination programme that aims to provide shots to the 15 million most vulnerable people and carers by February 15. Once that goal has been achieved, ministers will consider if and how restrictions can safely begin to be eased.

“We remain in a perilous situation,” Mr Johnson said. The spread of a more contagious and potentially more deadly new strain had set back the government’s ambitions for reopening the economy in the spring, he said.

Ministers have been debating border measures including quarantining all arrivals

in hotels. In the end, the prime minister announced a more limited policy aimed at arrivals from specific countries thought to be most at risk of carrying a new variant of the disease.

Extra police will be stationed at ports and airports to stop Britons leaving the UK to go on holiday or for any other non-essential reason, Home Secretary Priti Patel said. "Anyone who does not have a valid reason for travel will be directed to return home."

Source:

<https://www.independent.ie/world-news/coronavirus/uk-death-toll-hits-100000-as-johnson-locks-down-to-march-40020883.html>

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