

COVID-19 cases surge in Britain as government considers ending restrictions weeks earlier than announced

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18 June 2021

COVID-19 cases are surging in Britain. Daily cases have risen more than fivefold in the last month. According to Public Health England (PHE) data out this week, case rates per 100,000 people continue to increase in all regions and age-groups.

On May 17, the day most of the economy was reopened, 1,979 coronavirus cases were reported. A month later, on June 17, the daily case number was 11,007—the highest for almost four months. In the week to Friday 61,181 people tested positive, up 15,286 on the week prior.

Deaths due to the disease are increasing after having finally reached zero in Britain on June 1 due to the rollout of the vaccination programme and limited lockdown measures. In the last week, 72 deaths have been reported, up 18 percent on the week before.

The R (Reproduction) rate of the virus jumped in the last week in England from between 1 and 1.2 to between 1.2 and 1.4. The north-west had the highest rate at 1.3 to 1.5, with London's surging from 1.1 to 1.4.

According to data compiled for the last seven days by Worldometers, and based on official government figures, the UK's 34 percent increase in cases is second only to Russia (40 percent) in Europe.

The surge is being driven by the Delta variant of COVID-19, which just months after being detected in Britain has become the dominant strain. Delta was first detected on April 1, but the government did not make its existence public until April 15. A PHE report issued yesterday found that cases of Delta had increased by 80 percent in just the last week, making up 99 percent of all COVID cases nationwide.

These figures torpedo claims made in the media this

week that virus infections were levelling off. The assertions were made based on data from the ZOE Covid study app. However, the lead scientist on the app, Professor Tim Spector, has consistently played down the danger of the Delta variant. On May 20, Spector said that the Delta variant “hasn't altered numbers significantly”, adding, “While the outbreaks remain localised and UK numbers are steady and most cases appear mild, it's highly unlikely to cause the NHS to be overrun or stop us coming out of lockdown [scheduled for June 21].”

The reality was that the surge in COVID cases was such that even Boris Johnson's government, which has overseen at least 152,000 deaths due to its herd immunity agenda, did not feel able to end all restrictions on June 21, with Parliament voting Wednesday to extend the deadline by a month.

This week Spector said, “The good news is that this isn't going up as fast as it was... This has been a much better week than it was last week. I think we can start to see an end to this little mini wave in the young and the extra time [after the government was forced to back down on the June 21 reopening] we've got should be able to squash this from getting out of control.”

He concluded, “If we look at the way past waves have come and gone I would be predicting that this should be peaking around 10 to 14 days' time and then start to fall, so by four weeks we are at a much lower level than we are now, and much more manageable.”

In fact, the government is preparing for substantial new waves of infection and death. In announcing the delay to the final ending of restrictions, Johnson said, “At a certain stage, we are going to have to learn to live with the virus”.

Johnson declared that July 19 would be the “terminus date” for a full reopening, justified on the basis that it would allow more people to be vaccinated and establish a “very considerable wall of immunity around the whole of the population”.

This ignores the fact that millions of people, particularly the youngest in society, will remain un- or partially vaccinated, allowing the virus to circulate in high numbers. Dr. Susan Hopkins, the strategic response director for COVID-19 at Public Health England, told Parliament’s science and technology select committee on Wednesday that the Delta variant would spread with an R of 5-7 with no restrictions in place.

As well as infecting the unvaccinated, with potential long-term health impacts, the virus will quickly find the vulnerable whose vaccines have not produced a strong immune response. It will be given every opportunity to mutate again into an even more dangerous variant. Hopkins told the committee that PHE is currently monitoring 25 new variants, eight of which were under investigation.

What “learning to live with the virus” really means was partially admitted by SAGE member Professor Graham Medley and the government’s chief scientific officer Chris Whitty. Asked on BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme whether the country could see hundreds of deaths a day again, Medley replied, “Oh easily. I think we still might at some point.”

Whitty told the NHS Confederation conference, “My expectation is that we will get a further winter surge, late autumn/winter surge... I think we need to be aware of and brace for the fact that the coming winter may well be quite a difficult one.”

These consequences will overwhelmingly fall on the working class, especially its poorest sections, as they have done throughout the pandemic. Whitty added during his speech, “The geographical areas where COVID has hit have been extremely defined, where the biggest problems have been repeated.

“So, you see in situations in Bradford, in Leicester, in bits of London for example, in bits of the North West, you see repeated areas where places have been hit over and over again in areas of deprivation.”

In a chilling statement, given the government’s responsibility for overseeing social murder in the pandemic, Whitty noted, “Indeed in many of them, if

you had a map of COVID’s biggest effects now and a map of child deaths in 1850, they look remarkably similar. These are areas where deprivation has been prolonged and deeply entrenched.”

On this basis a substantial section of the Tory party and the media are calling for an end to restrictions as soon as possible.

Fifty-one Tory MPs voted against any delay to June 21, including former party leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith, chair of the 1922 committee Sir Graham Brady, and chair of the Covid Recovery Group of Tory MPs and former chief whip Mark Harper. Rebel MP Sir Desmond Swayne said of a delay in ending all anti-COVID measures, “I could understand it if we were a communist party, but this is the party that inherited the true wisdom of the Whig tradition.”

Under a headline “Could we be free on July 5?” The *Daily Mail* reported Friday, “Downing Street has opened the door to ending restrictions on July 5, amid growing evidence that assumptions used by government scientists to justify delaying Freedom Day were too pessimistic.”

The paper cited a government source who said, “The decision to delay reopening was so finely balanced—probably the most difficult decision of the whole pandemic—that the PM wanted a review point built in so that if things did change we could move sooner.”

The newspaper editorialised that “on the back of scientists’ scaremongering, lives are being wrecked. The economy is shackled, pubs and restaurants are going bankrupt and jobs are lost.”



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