

UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid warns of 100,000 daily COVID cases after government ends restrictions

Robert Stevens
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“I want to stress from the outset that this pandemic is far from over. As we predicted in the roadmap, we are seeing cases rise. There could be 50,000 cases per day. We are seeing rising hospital admissions and we must reconcile ourselves with more deaths.”

With these words Monday evening, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the lifting of all restrictions against COVID-19 in England and declared himself a political criminal.

The next morning, newly installed Health Secretary Sajid Javid revealed the full implications of the government’s plans. He told BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme that the UK was in “uncharted territory” and that daily new cases “could reach as high as 100,000” by August. Javid refused to answer what this is expected to mean for hospitalisations. The new health secretary was recommended to Johnson for the position as a more forceful advocate of ending all restrictions.

From July 19, masks will no longer be required in shops, hospitality venues or on public transport as the legal requirement to wear them is withdrawn. No restrictions on social contact will be left in place, as the 1m-plus social distancing rule will also end. All businesses will be allowed to open. Any COVID rules inside hospitality venues will cease and capacity limits will be scrapped. Mass events, such as music festivals, will be authorised and house parties will no longer be illegal. In care homes, where tens of thousands perished as a result of the social murder policy of the government, the limit to five named visitors will be dropped.

From August 16, double-vaccinated adults and all under-18s will no longer have to self-isolate if they have been in close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Last month, Johnson delayed a final ending of restrictions, due to be carried out on June 14, after a surge in infections propelled by the reopening of much of the economy on May

17. This allowed cases, which had fallen by then to under 2,000 a day, to spread like wildfire as the more transmissible Delta variant became dominant.

The situation is much worse now than then. One in 260 people in England currently has coronavirus, according to the Office for National Statistics. Well over 20,000 new infections are being reported daily with cases leaping by 74 percent week on week. Today, 28,773 coronavirus cases were recorded, the highest daily total since the end of January, taking the total in the last seven days to 186,422—an average per day of 26,631. Despite nearly two-thirds of UK adults having had the required two vaccine doses, 142 deaths have been reported in the last week and there are 2,092 COVID patients in hospital.

At the height of the pandemic, on January 8, 2021, cases peaked at over 67,000 cases a day. Javid now admits that tens of thousands more infections even than this could be hitting the population in weeks, with tens of millions of people, mainly school children and the young, still unvaccinated.

Scotland, the northeast and northwest of England are recording some of the highest rates in Europe. According to World Health Organization figures out this week, seven of the top 9 worst-hit regions in Europe are in Britain. Only two other non-UK regions, in Kazakhstan and Russia, feature in the list. Scotland, with a population of 5 million, has Britain’s highest COVID rate, with an estimated one in 150 people infected. The highest rate recorded on the WHO’s list is in Tayside, 1,146 cases per 100,000 people.

The abandonment of measures that, along with the vaccination programme, have saved many lives is being rammed through against scientific advice. Ahead of Johnson’s speech, Mark Woolhouse, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh, warned, “The UK is in an absolutely unique position... We have the biggest Delta outbreak in a well-vaccinated country. We are a petri dish for the world.”

Ending all restrictions is also opposed by a majority of the population. YouGov poll findings published yesterday found that nearly three quarters of Britons (71 percent) want face masks to remain compulsory on public transport. Two thirds (66 percent) said they should remain in shops and some enclosed public spaces. Over two thirds, (70 percent) said they would feel less safe in a crowded or unventilated place if people were not wearing face masks.

The right to work under safe conditions is being trampled on. Asked if workers would have a legal right not to go into work if they are concerned about their health, Johnson's spokesman said the government was not introducing any new employment rights with the dropping of restrictions.

This is the collective policy of the capitalist class. Johnson announced the ending of restrictions flanked by his yes men, Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty and Chief Scientific Officer Sir Patrick Vallance. The Scottish National Party government is moving towards the ending of compulsory restrictions only a few weeks after Johnson, on August 9.

On Sunday, Javid tweeted, "We are going to have to learn to live with Covid and find ways to cope with it—just as we already do with flu," and linked to an article he had penned for the anti-lockdown *Mail on Sunday* newspaper.

Monday's *Mail* devoted two inside pages to defending Javid from scientific "doomsters" who opposed his comparing of COVID-19 with flu. Among those ridiculed were Professor Stephen Reicher, a member of the government's own Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) subcommittee advising on behaviour. Reicher stated that it "is frightening to have a 'health' secretary who still thinks Covid is flu. Who is unconcerned at levels of infection. Who doesn't realise that those who do best for health, also do best for the economy. Above all, it is frightening to have a 'health' secretary who wants to make all protections a matter of personal choice when the key message of the pandemic is 'this isn't an "I" thing, it's a "we" thing'."

The herd immunity policies carried out by the Johnson government contributed massively to the spread of COVID through the circulation of more deadly variants, including the Alpha variant last autumn. Delta has been allowed to spread from single figure cases in Britain to tens of thousands daily within months.

Another attacked in the right-wing media is Professor Susan Michie of University College London, another member of SAGE's behavioural subcommittee. She tweeted of the government's policy. "Allowing community transmission to surge is like building new 'variant factories' at a very fast rate."

Editorials Monday could not have been clearer that the ruling elite views COVID restrictions as impediments to

hoarding wealth and piling up profits.

Describing Hancock as "lockdown fixated", the *Mail* commented that since Javid's arrival, "the shift in tone from ministers has been astonishing... Javid seems refreshingly eager to get Britain motoring again." Javid was correct because "... the country's health and wealth are inextricably intertwined—one cannot exist without the other. So we welcome the Prime Minister's bonfire of coronavirus controls." It concluded by denouncing "Shroud-waving scientists and doctors" as "doomsters" who "must be faced down."

The *Daily Telegraph* demanded Johnson not turn to any lockdown measures again, declaring, "Schools must return in the autumn, no longer hampered by requirements for pupils to isolate when a child gets Covid... As we have argued for months, this virus is endemic and will have to be lived with, just as we live with other illnesses such as flu."

The population "should be under no illusions that as the winter approaches, respiratory diseases like Covid and influenza will increase, people will fall ill and thousands will die, as happens every year. When it does, the Government needs to resist the inevitable calls for more lockdown measures if July 19 is truly to be an irreversible moment."

Labour's Shadow Health Secretary Jonathan Ashworth, responding to Javid's call to end restrictions, complained that Javid's announcement Monday, "isn't a guarantee that restrictions will end—only what it will look like." He asked Javid to allow people to continue to wear masks as "We're not out of the woods..."

The trade unions, who work with Labour as de facto partners of the Tories, will likewise do nothing to prevent restrictions being torn up.

The main lesson of last year and a half is that the working class globally confronts not only a public health catastrophe, but a political crisis. Workers are being treated with contempt by a ruling elite who are solely interested in getting richer, no matter the cost in human lives and health, and who rule through parties which, whatever their formal colouration, slavishly serve the interests of big business. The deadly agenda of the ruling class can only be stopped by a unified struggle of workers based on the fight for a socialist programme, putting life before the profits of the capitalists.



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