

# Britain faces 6 months of coronavirus curbs

## We can't revert to normal, warns medical chief

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Life in Britain will not return to normal for six months, the public were warned yesterday, as ministers began preparing the country for an extended period of lockdown.

Jenny Harries, the deputy chief medical officer for England, said that the strict social distancing rules in place at present would have to remain for between two and three months.

She warned that it would be a further three months before all the present restrictions were lifted, and even then there were likely to be “bumps” as new clusters of cases were identified.



“We must not suddenly revert to our normal way of living. That would be quite dangerous,” she said. “If we stop them [the restrictions] all of our efforts will have been wasted and we could see

a second peak. So over time, probably the next six months, we will see where we are going. We need to keep that lid on and then gradually we will be able to hopefully adjust some of the social distance measures and gradually get us all back to normal.

In other developments:

- The death toll in Britain rose by 209 yesterday to 1,228. A further 2,433 people were diagnosed with the virus.
- Boris Johnson, who is in self-isolation, issued a video message last night, announcing that 20,000 former NHS staff had responded to the government's call to return to the front line.
- The government warned that the numbers of dead and infected would increase in the next two weeks.
- Ministers said that no one working in the NHS or social care would need to do so without the "right" protective equipment as they announced that the government had procured 170 million masks, 42.8 million pairs of gloves, 13.7 million aprons, 182,000 gowns, almost 10 million items of cleaning equipment and 2.3 million pairs of eye protectors for frontline staff.
- Officials have ordered 17.5 million virus tests for use by the middle of next month.
- The government was challenged on whether it was doing enough to ensure that the country had enough ventilators and would meet its testing target.
- The Times* revealed that the police planned to drop investigations of some crimes if the virus led to shortages of staff.
- Thousands of Britons flouted the rules on gatherings and social distancing, with police forced to break up football matches and, in one case, a karaoke party.

••One of the doctors leading the response to the outbreak in the United States said that more than 100,000 Americans could die from the disease.

Dr Harries's warning came after Michael Gove, the Cabinet Office minister, said that Britain needed to prepare for a "significant period" of lockdown and that matters would "get worse" before they got better. Both comments make it almost inevitable that the government will extend the restrictions beyond the three weeks initially announced by the prime minister last Monday. That could mean schools and universities not reopening until the autumn and people being told to continue working from home.

Speaking on *The Andrew Marr Show*, Mr Gove said that the duration of the lockdown would be determined by its effectiveness in reducing the number of new cases. He suggested that it was likely to be extended beyond April 13, when it is due to be reviewed.

"Everyone is making a sacrifice and I appreciate the scale of that sacrifice," he said. "But the reason all of us are making these sacrifices is because all of us will have people whom we love who are at risk from this virus. I can't make an accurate prediction [of how long the lockdown will last], but everyone does have to prepare for a significant period when these measures are still in place."

Dr Harries said that the government would review the effect of the lockdown in a fortnight but that it would be "two or three months to see if we've really squashed it" and between three to six months before Britain "can actually get back to normal".

"This is not to say we would be in complete lockdown for six months, but as a nation we have to be really, really responsible and keep doing what we're all doing until we're sure we can gradually start lifting various interventions which are likely to be spaced until we gradually come back to a normal way of living," she said.

Matt Hancock, the health secretary, who is self-isolating having contracted the illness, announced on Twitter yesterday morning that the government had met its target of carrying out 10,000 new

coronavirus tests a day. Official government figures released later cast doubt on that claim as they showed that just under 7,000 tests had been carried out yesterday. The government has vowed to increase testing to 25,000 a day as soon as possible.

Mr Gove acknowledged that Britain had carried out fewer tests than countries such as Germany that have been more successful in reducing the death rate. “It’s certainly the case the Germans have had success in testing,” he said. “There are other countries that are also ramping up testing. But the acceleration here in the UK is significant. If one looks at a league table, then the UK is rising up that,” he said.

Tony Blair, the former prime minister, said that a point would need to be reached where a “very large” proportion of the entire population was tested for coronavirus.