By Jennifer Brown, Esme Kirk-Wade

22 December 2021

Coronavirus: A history of 'Lockdown laws' in England

Summary
1 Background
2 Full national lockdowns
3 Local lockdowns
4 Timeline

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Summary

Hundreds of laws have been made in the UK in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Many of these could be described as “lockdown laws” because they placed restrictions on people to slow the spread of the coronavirus. This briefing uses the term “lockdown laws” to describe national and local coronavirus restrictions, regulations and directions which placed restrictions on movement, gatherings and high-street businesses.

The Library’s paper Coronavirus: the lockdown laws provides a detailed discussion of these laws. A collection of briefings on coronavirus restrictions is available on the Library’s website.

Coronavirus guidance and the lockdown laws

The Government has published a huge range of guidance relating to coronavirus. Most coronavirus guidance has been a mixture of information on the law and public health advice. The UK Government amended and adapted its coronavirus guidance as its response to coronavirus progressed. Some of these changes did not require changes to the law but did have a significant impact on how people experienced the lockdown. Coronavirus guidance is not discussed in detail in this briefing.

First national lockdown (March to June 2020)

England was in national lockdown between late March and June 2020. Initially, all “non-essential” high street businesses were closed and people were ordered to stay at home, permitted to leave for essential purposes only, such as buying food or for medical reasons. Starting in May 2020, the laws were slowly relaxed. People were permitted to leave home for outdoor recreation (beyond exercise) from 13 May. On 1 June, the restriction on leaving home was replaced with a requirement to be home overnight, and people were permitted to meet outside in groups of up to six people.

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1 See: legislation.gov.uk, coronavirus legislation, undated
Minimal lockdown restrictions (July to September 2020)

Most lockdown restrictions were lifted on 4 July 2020. Most hospitality businesses were permitted to reopen. New health and safety guidance on operating businesses “Covid securely” was published. Gatherings up to thirty people were legally permitted, although the Government was still recommending people avoid gatherings larger than six.

Reimposing restrictions (September to October 2020)

On 14 September, restrictions for gathering in England were tightened and people were once again legally prohibited from meeting more than six people socially. The new “rule of six” applied both indoors and outdoors. Eleven days later, pubs, bars and restaurants were told they had to shut between 10pm and 6am.

During this period, a range of local restrictions were imposed across England. On the 14 October, the Government rationalised local restrictions by introducing a “three tier system”. At first, most of the country was placed in the least restrictive tier one, which had similar restrictions to the previous national rules. As time went on, more of the country was placed in the higher two tiers.

Second national lockdown (November 2020)

On 5 November, national restrictions were reintroduced in England. During the second national lockdown, non-essential high street businesses were closed, and people were prohibited from meeting those not in their “support bubble” inside. People could leave home to meet one person from outside their support bubble outdoors.

Reintroducing a tiered system (December 2020)

On 2 December, the tiered system was reintroduced with modifications.
Restrictions on hospitality businesses were stricter and most locations were initially placed in tiers two and three. On 19 December, the Prime Minister announced that a fourth tier would be introduced, following concerns about a rising number of coronavirus cases due to a new variant (what was to become known as the Alpha variant, first identified in Kent).

The tier four rules were like those imposed during the second national lockdown. On 30 December, after the first review of tiers under the new system, around 75% of the country was placed under tier four restrictions.

Third national lockdown (January to March 2021)

Following concerns that the four-tier system was not containing the spread of the Alpha variant, national restrictions were reintroduced for a third time on 6 January.

The rules during the third lockdown were more like those in the first lockdown. People were once again told to stay at home. However, people could still form support bubbles (if eligible) and some gatherings were exempted from the gatherings ban (for example, religious services and some small weddings were permitted).

Leaving lockdown (March to July 2021)

On 8 March 2021, England began a phased exit from lockdown. A four-step plan, known as the roadmap out of lockdown, intended to “cautiously but irreversibly” ease lockdown restrictions. Instead of a return to the tiered system, the Government said it planned to lift restrictions in all areas at the same time, as the level of infection was broadly similar across England.²

England moved through the roadmap as planned but step four was delayed by four weeks to allow more people to receive their first dose of a coronavirus vaccine.

² HM Govt, Covid-19 response- Spring 2021, February 2021, para 81
1 Background

1.1 What are lockdown laws?

The Library uses the term “lockdown laws” to describe legal restrictions on movement, gatherings and high-street businesses designed to help prevent the spread of an infectious disease. During the coronavirus pandemic, the UK Government used lockdown laws to significantly reduce social contact between people. They applied both nationally and locally.

There was some form of lockdown law in force in England between March 2020 and July 2021. They changed frequently in response to the epidemiological situation and were supplemented with changing public health guidance.

This briefing mostly discusses legislation that imposed legal restrictions on individuals and businesses during lockdown. In brief, these requirements were put in place through regulations using an “urgent” power in the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984. This paper does not discuss any other legal requirements in relation to the wearing of face coverings, or self-isolation for individuals who have tested positive for Covid-19, or close contacts.

Other restrictions and rules were not imposed through law but were set out in Government guidance. These are not the focus of this briefing but are discussed in detail in section three of the briefing Coronavirus: The lockdown laws. In that briefing we also explain how lockdown laws have been made and amended, how they related to other types of coronavirus legislation and how they were/are supplemented with public health guidance.

### The types of lockdown law applied nationally in England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stay home</td>
<td>People prohibited from leaving home without a “reasonable excuse”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying away</td>
<td>People prohibited from staying away from home overnight without a “reasonable excuse”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International travel ban</td>
<td>People prohibited from leaving the United Kingdom without a “reasonable excuse”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social gatherings ban</strong></td>
<td>Gatherings of more than two people prohibited unless for a limited number of exempted purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rule of six</strong></td>
<td>Gatherings of more than six people prohibited unless they are for an exempted purposes (exemptions changed over time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Large gatherings</strong></td>
<td>Gatherings of more than thirty people prohibited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-essential high-street business closures</strong></td>
<td>Non-essential high-street and hospitality businesses must close. Pubs, bars and restaurants can operate a takeaway/delivery service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening times</strong></td>
<td>Pubs, bars and restaurants must close at a specific time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.2 Government policy

The UK Government has published several coronavirus strategies since March 2020. These documents set out Government actions and plans for the next phase of its response to the virus. They provide an insight into how the Government’s Covid-19 strategy evolved in response to the changing context, wider developments, and available evidence.

The following strategies cover the period lockdown laws were in force:

- [Coronavirus: action plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan), March 2020
- [Our plan to rebuild: The recovery strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-recovery-strategy), May 2020
- [The next chapter in our plan to rebuild: The recovery strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-next-chapter-in-our-plan-to-rebuild-the-recovery-strategy), July 2020
The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

Throughout the pandemic, the Government has frequently stated that it’s Covid-19 policy is “guided by the science.” The primary source of scientific advice to the Government is SAGE.

SAGE is activated during emergencies to provide scientific and technical advice to support government decision makers. SAGE has been advising the Government on responding to the pandemic since January 2020. SAGE’s advice does not represent official government policy.

The SAGE Q&A (PDF, 101 KB) provides further information on the advice provided by the group to the Government:

SAGE’s role is to provide unified scientific advice on all the key issues, based on the body of scientific evidence presented by its expert participants. This includes everything from latest knowledge of the virus to modelling the disease course, understanding the clinical picture, and effects of and compliance with interventions. This advice together with a descriptor of uncertainties is then passed onto government ministers. The advice is used by Ministers to allow them to make decisions and inform the government’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The government, naturally, also considers a range of other evidence including economic, social, and broader environmental factors when making its decisions.

The Government has made evidence considered by SAGE available to view on a GOV.UK webpage. The webpage notes that SAGE evidence has often been compiled quickly as the situation was changing rapidly. It says it represents the “best assessment of the evidence at the time of writing.”

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3 See, for example: Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19), 18 March 2020
4 DHSC, The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), May 2020
5 SAGE, Scientific evidence supporting the government response to coronavirus (Covid-19), last updated 22 October 2021
2 Full national lockdowns

Three full national lockdowns were imposed in England in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The first national lockdown was in force between March and June 2020, the second in November of the same year, and the third between January and March 2021.

During full lockdowns, the rules governing movement, gatherings and high-street business operations were at their most restrictive. Periods of lockdown were characterised by the following basic set of rules:

- People had to stay at home
- People had to minimise their social contact
- Non-essential high street businesses had to close (like hairdressers, non-essential retail and restaurants – although businesses that could were able to operate remotely via delivery).

These rules tended to be lifted gradually as the country exited lockdown. Between full lockdowns some restrictions remained in place. The Government favoured a policy of targeted local restrictions in Autumn 2020 (discussed in section 3 of this briefing).

2.1 Entering lockdown

Before each full lockdown was introduced, the Government aimed to manage the spread of the coronavirus with less strict restrictions. In a joint report, the Health and Social Care and Science and Technology Committees attributed this to the “immense harm” it was perceived lockdown would cause to “the economy, normal health services and society”.

National lockdowns have been imposed at very short notice. In the cases of both the first and third lockdowns, the instruction for people to stay at home and for businesses to close preceded the legislation to enforce this.

First national lockdown

The Health and Social Care and Science and Technology Committees have described the UK Government as taking a “gradual and incremental

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6 Health & Social Care and Science & Technology Committees, Coronavirus: lessons learned to date, 12 October 2021, p17
approach” to introducing non-pharmaceutical interventions in the early stages of the pandemic, to delay a full lockdown. They said this was part of a policy intended to “manage” the spread of the coronavirus, rather than stopping it altogether.

Days before the first lockdown was announced, Prime Minister Boris Johnson told a Downing Street press conference that the UK could “turn the tide of this disease” within the next 12 weeks. However, the rising rate of infection led to the introduction of England’s first national lockdown on Monday 23 March 2020. To enforce this, the police would be granted additional powers to disperse gatherings and issue fines. On Thursday 26 March regulations were made which gave effect to the new lockdown restrictions and the new police powers.

Criticism of the Government’s initial response

The Government’s delayed response in the early stages of the pandemic has come under criticism. The Institute for Government has pointed to a “heavy reliance” on SAGE as a factor in this, suggesting that the limited evidence available at this point meant that SAGE was not able to provide the answers the Government was looking to it for.

While it has been noted that the decision to impose a lockdown helped contain the spread of the virus and reduce transmission, it has been argued that more lives would have been saved if this decision had been taken earlier. The Health & Social Care and Science & Technology Committees have described decision making in these early weeks as “one of the most important public health failures the United Kingdom has ever experienced”.

Second national lockdown

Cases began to rise again in October 2020. SAGE advised that a two week ‘circuit breaker’ (a short and sharp lockdown) could return incidence of

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7 Non-pharmaceutical interventions are any measures (other than medicines or vaccines) that can be taken to help slow the spread of illnesses eg, school closures, social distancing.
8 Health & Social Care and Science & Technology Committees, Coronavirus: lessons learned to date, 12 October 2021, p32-33
9 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 19 March 2020
10 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 23 March 2020
11 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020
12 Institute for Government, Decision making in a crisis, August 2020, p6 & p39
13 Ibid
14 Health & Social Care and Science & Technology Committees, Coronavirus: lessons learned to date, 12 October 2021, p33
Covid-19 to manageable levels.\textsuperscript{15} The Government implemented a new localised tiered system at this time (see section 3.2).

On 21 October, when pressed to commit to introducing a “circuit breaker” by the Leader of the Opposition during PMQs, the Prime Minister cited social and economic factors for his reluctance towards this measure:

\[\ldots\text{I have explained why I do not believe that [Sir Keir Starmer’s] policy is the right one for the country, because it would involve closing schools and shuttering businesses, with all the psychological and emotional damage that a lockdown of that kind brings. He cannot say how many circuit breakers he thinks would be necessary. He cannot say how long they would go on. He cannot say how much damage they would do to the UK economy and to people’s mental health.}\textsuperscript{16}\]

However, a second lockdown was announced on 31 October (imposed from 5 November) and the public was once again instructed to “stay at home”.\textsuperscript{17}

Regulations were made to implement a national lockdown in England for a period of 28 days, which expired on 2 December.\textsuperscript{18}

### Third national lockdown

Following the second lockdown, a modified tier system was introduced (discussed in section 3.3 of this paper). At this time, the Government announced plans to allow families and friends to meet at Christmas. It stated that during the 23-27 December up to three households could form a “Christmas bubble”.\textsuperscript{19}

Despite the legal provision for people to meet up over the Christmas period, scientists and the Government said people should exercise caution. At the end of November, the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty, said he would not advise someone to hug an elderly relative at Christmas and that even though something was legally allowed, it did not mean that someone should do it.\textsuperscript{20}

By mid-December, cases of Covid-19 started to increase rapidly, particularly in London, the South East and East of England. Concerns were compounded by the detection of a new variant (B.1.1.7) of Covid-19 (the “Alpha” variant).
first identified in the UK. Its discovery was first made known to the public in a statement to the House of Commons by the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, on 14 December.  

On 19 December, the Prime Minister, the Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser and the Chief Medical officer, announced that urgent changes needed to be made to coronavirus restrictions. Stricter measures were applied across London and large parts of the South East of England, alongside changes to the rules in England over the Christmas period. The Prime Minister said that because of the evidence of a new variant of the coronavirus, Christmas plans in England could not continue.  

Shortly after Christmas, on Monday 4 January, the Prime Minister addressed the nation to announce a third national lockdown for England in response to the rise in cases. He said that hospitals “are under more pressure from Covid than at any time since the start of the pandemic” and that it was “clear that we need to do more, together, to bring [the] new variant of the virus under control while our vaccines are rolled out”.  

The Government made amendment regulations on 5 January 2021 to the existing tier system regulations to bring the national lockdown into force. The changes came into force at midnight on 6 January, although people were urged to stay at home from 4 January.

2.2 The rules during lockdown

The Government imposed a range of rules during national lockdowns, which changed over time and in response to the situation at the time. This section provides a brief overview of these rules.

Stay at home

The stay-at-home order was the cornerstone of England’s national lockdowns. The first lockdown law made it an offence to be leave home without a “reasonable excuse”. Shortly after being made, the regulations were

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21 HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 14 December 2020
22 The Prime Minister’s Office, Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 19 December 2020
23 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 19 December 2020
24 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister announces national lockdown, 4 January 2021
25 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister’s address to the nation, 4 January 2021
26 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
27 R6, The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 [as made]
amended and it became an offence be “outside of” home without a reasonable excuse.28 This closed a legal loophole that allowed people to be outside of home without an excuse assuming they left home with one.29

The regulations did not define the term “reasonable excuse”, but they did provide non-exhaustive lists of reasonable excuses to be outside.30 As the list was non-exhaustive, people were permitted be outside for a reason not listed provided it could be considered reasonable.

The non-exhaustive list was different for each lockdown. During the second and third lockdowns the list included exercise in a public place with one person not in your household.31 This allowed people to meet one other person outside so long as they were exercising, something that was not permissible in the early stages of the first lockdown. During the third lockdown it also included “to attend a place of worship”.32 This was not permissible during the first two lockdowns.

The regulations did not limit the number of times a person could leave their home per day, how far they could travel or the length of time they could spend outside. Individuals were permitted to leave home multiple times and for any period provided they had a “reasonable excuse”.

Social gatherings ban

The lockdown regulations made it an offence to gather in public in groups of more than two people. There were originally four listed exemptions to this rule that:

- Gatherings involving members of the same household. In the second and third lockdown this was extended to include those in a “support bubble” or “childcare bubble” (see below);
- Gatherings essential for work purposes;
- Funerals; and
- Gatherings necessary to move house, provide care or assistance to a vulnerable person, provide emergency assistance, participate in legal proceedings or fulfil a legal obligation.33

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28 reg(4)(a), The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020; reg(2); see also: House of Commons Library, Coronavirus: Parliamentary consent for the lockdown in England, 4 May 2020
29 See: House of Commons Library, Parliamentary consent for England’s lockdown, 4 May 2020
30 reg. 3(2), The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 [as at 31 May 2020]
31 reg. 3(2)(c)(ii), The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2020; Schedule 3A, Part 1, para 2(2)(c), The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020
33 reg. 2, The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 [as made]
Support bubbles and childcare bubbles

The phrase “support bubble” was used to describe an arrangement where two households were permitted to join. Initially it was only possible between an adult who lived alone or in a single parent household and the adult(s) in one other household. However, a number of changes were made which permitted the following households to also form a support bubble with another household in a range of other scenarios:

- any household with a child under one;
- any household with a child under five with a disability that needs continuous care; and
- any household where one adult is living with another adult (or adults) with a disability who requires continuous care.34

Once joined in a support bubble the two households were considered as one under lockdown laws. Support bubbles had a legal status.35

The phrase “childcare bubble” was used to describe a situation where two households are linked for the purposes of providing informal childcare. First introduced during the second national lockdown, this arrangement was defined in legislation and could only apply where one household included at least one child under the age of 13.36

People could only be a member of one support bubble. However, someone could be part of both a support bubble and a childcare bubble.37

Closure of non-essential high street businesses

The lockdown laws required a range of high-street businesses to close their premises. There were four broad types of restrictions:

- Businesses required to close their premises completely (eg cinemas, hairdressers);
- Businesses required to close except for processing takeaways and deliveries (eg restaurants and cafes);
- Businesses required to close except for processing online orders (eg non-essential retailers, such as clothing stores); and

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34 DHSC, Making a support bubble with another household, 17 May 2021 [Withdrawn]
35 See, for example: cl2, The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2012
36 cl3, The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2012
37 cl2(8), The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2020
• Businesses required to close except for carrying out certain permitted activities (such as hotels).\textsuperscript{38}

2.3 Exiting lockdown

The Government followed “steps” to easing lockdown restrictions at the end of the first and third lockdown. In autumn 2020, instead of a national easing of restrictions, a tiered system (where different restrictions applied in local areas) replaced the second lockdown.

First national lockdown

During the first lockdown, the Government was legally required to review the “need for restrictions” every three weeks.\textsuperscript{39} It used these review points to announce whether lockdown would be extended or amended. At the second formal review (10 May 2020) the Government published its covid-19 recovery strategy which included a three step roadmap to lifting restrictions and adjusting public health guidance.\textsuperscript{40} The roadmap was not as detailed as the used at the end of the third lockdown but it did include indicative dates.

- **Step one** (13 May 2020): allowing outdoor recreation, people could meet with one person from outside their household outdoors.
- **Step two** (anticipated to commence 1 June 2020): opening non-essential retail, permitting cultural and sporting events behind closed doors, and a relaxation of gathering rules including the introduction of some form of bubble system.
- **Step three** (anticipated to commence 4 July 2020): opening the remaining businesses including hospitality and leisure facilities.

The Government warned that it could not “predict with absolute certainty what the impact of lifting restrictions will be” and therefore restrictions might need to be reimposed.\textsuperscript{41} Moving through the steps was dependent on the country meeting five tests:

1. Protect the NHS’s ability to cope. We must be confident that we are **able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment** right across the UK.

\textsuperscript{38} See generally Coronavirus: Business re-opening, Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-8945, 5 August 2020
\textsuperscript{39} P(HO), The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020
\textsuperscript{40} Cabinet Office, Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government’s COVID-19 recovery strategy, 24 July 2020
\textsuperscript{41} HM Govt, Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government’s COVID-19 recovery strategy, May 2020, p25
2. See a **sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates** from COVID-19 so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak.

3. Reliable data from SAGE showing that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels across the board.

4. Be confident that the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand, with supply able to meet future demand.

5. Be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that overwhelms the NHS.

The Government moved through the indicative timetable as planned. However, because the recovery strategy included little detail of the proposed rules at each step, major announcements were still needed at each stage to explain the upcoming changes (see section 4 of this briefing for detail).

**The steps out of the third lockdown**

On Monday 22 February 2021, the Prime Minister made a statement to the House of Commons setting out a four-step plan for easing the third set of lockdown restrictions in England, as part of the Government’s roadmap out of lockdown. While acknowledging that the threat posed by the virus “remains substantial”, the Prime Minister credited the “resolve of the British public and the extraordinary success of our NHS in vaccinating over 17.5 million people across the UK” for enabling these steps to be taken.

The Prime Minister stated the intention for the roadmap to be “cautious but irreversible”, describing it as a “one-way road to freedom”. However, he also said that the Government could not “rule out re-imposing restrictions at local or regional level if evidence suggests they are necessary to contain or suppress a new variant which escapes the vaccines”.

Instead of a return to the tier system, he confirmed that the Government planned to lift restrictions in all areas at the same time as the level of infection was “broadly similar” across England.

The roadmap was tied to four indicative dates by which the Government expected to move through the steps. However, this was conditional on meeting four tests:

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42 HC Deb, Covid-19: Road Map, 22 February 2021 [volume 689, c625-628]
43 Ibid, c625
44 Ibid, c628
45 Ibid., c625
1. The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
2. Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
3. Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
4. Our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.\textsuperscript{46}

### England’s roadmap out of the third lockdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Gatherings</th>
<th>Business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International travel ban</td>
<td>Rule of six (outdoors)</td>
<td>Closures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 1 from 29 March 2021
People were prohibited from leaving the United Kingdom without a “reasonable excuse”.

#### 2 From 12 April 2021
People were prohibited from leaving the United Kingdom without a “reasonable excuse”.

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\textsuperscript{46} Cabinet Office, \textit{COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 (Summary)}, 22 February 2021
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Large gatherings</th>
<th>Rule of six (inside)</th>
<th>Reopening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Outdoor gatherings over 30 people prohibited.</td>
<td>Indoor gatherings involving more than six people were prohibited unless exempted.</td>
<td>Hospitality could reopen inside for table service only. Nightclubs and sexual entertainment venues had to remain closed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Removal of “all legal limits on social contact”</td>
<td>Reopening of nightclubs and easing of restrictions on large events and performances.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Delaying step four**

Step four, which the roadmap stated would be reached “no earlier than 21 June”, involved lifting “all legal limits on social contact”.47

As this date approached, the Prime Minister announced in a Downing Street press conference that step four was to be delayed on account of concerns about the new 'Delta' variant, which he said was spreading faster than had been predicted in the February roadmap. The Prime Minister said that the NHS needed “a few more crucial weeks” to meet a target of having two thirds of the adult population double vaccinated.

Having met this target, England moved to step four on 19 July. When announcing this change, the Prime Minister noted that both cases and hospitalisations were on the rise and were likely to rise further. However, he said that this had been “clearly foreseen” when the roadmap was first set out and urged the public to “act with caution and with personal responsibility”.48

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47 Cabinet Office, COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 (Summary): Step 4, 22 February 2021
48 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, PM statement at coronavirus press conference: 12 July 2021; HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 12 July 2021 [volume 699, c23].

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20 Commons Library Research Briefing, 22 December 2021
3 Local lockdowns

The Government introduced a regional approach to lockdown restrictions throughout the Autumn and Winter of 2020. It applied stricter restrictions in areas with high infection rate growth.  

3.1 Early local restrictions

While the rest of the country was exiting the first national lockdown, stricter coronavirus restrictions for certain local areas were put in place from July 2020.

Leicester was the first city to be placed into “local lockdown” on 4 July. More areas followed during the summer and autumn.

Initially, local lockdowns were imposed via standalone regulations. These laws were made by the UK Government, but only applied in a specified “protected area”. The rules differed in each area and changed frequently. By October there was a patchwork of local restrictions across parts of England.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulations</th>
<th>Date introduced</th>
<th>Number of area changes</th>
<th>Date revoked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Leicester) Regulations 2020</td>
<td>4 July 2020</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 August 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Blackburn with Darwen and Luton) Regulations 2020</td>
<td>25 July 2020</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 August 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford) Regulations 2020</td>
<td>1 August 2020</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22 September 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Introduction of the first tier system

On 12 October, the Prime Minister told the House of Commons that the Government was “simplifying” local restrictions by introducing a tiered system:

In recent months we have worked with local leaders to counter local spikes with targeted restrictions. This local approach has inevitably produced different sets of rules in different parts of the country, which are now complex to understand and to enforce. So just as we simplified our national rules with the rule of six, we will now simplify and standardise our local rules by introducing a three-tiered system of local covid alert levels in England, set at medium, high and very high.\(^{52}\)

On 14 October 2020, the new tiered system for coronavirus restrictions was implemented.\(^{53}\) This remained in place until the start of the second lockdown (4 November 2020).

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\(^{52}\) HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 12 October 2020

### England’s first tier system (14 October – 4 November)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gatherings</th>
<th>High-street business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 | **Rule of six**
People prohibited from socialising in groups of more than six (unless for an exempt purpose) | **Opening hours**
Hospitality businesses must close at 10pm. |
| 2 | **Household mixing**
People prohibited from visiting meeting people they do not live indoors. | **Opening hours**
Hospitality businesses must close at 10pm. |
| 3 | **Household mixing**
People prohibited from mixing with other households both indoors and most outdoor settings. | **Opening hours**
Hospitality businesses must close at 10pm.  
**Alcohol restrictions**
Pubs, bars and restaurants must serve alcohol with a “substantial meal”. This rule means that “wet pubs” close. |

### 3.3 Reintroducing the tier system

On 23 November, the Prime Minister made a statement in the House of Commons setting out the Government’s [Covid-19 winter plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-winter-plan). The plan included the reintroduction of a modified tiered system from the 2 December (following the second national lockdown) and special measures for socialising during Christmas.54

The restrictions in the second tiered system differed from those in place before the November national lockdown. There were three main differences:55

- The business rules applicable to hospitality businesses in tier two were applied in tier three before the national lockdown. Under the new

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54 HC Deb, Covid-19: Winter Plan, 23 November 2020
system, hospitality businesses in tier three were required to close and move their business to takeaway only.

- Hospitality businesses permitted to remain open had to close at 11pm (instead of 10pm as was required under the first system).

- Organised large events (elite sport events, live performances) could take place in tiers one and two (with restrictions). Previously, organised large events weren’t permitted in any tier.

The following Thursday (26 November), the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced the tier allocations for England. Accompanying his statement was a document setting out the Government’s rationale for each allocation. Only Cornwall, the Isle of Scilly and the Isle of Wight were placed in tier one. The modified tiered system applied from 2 December 2020.

Introducing a tier four

In response to rapidly increasing cases of Covid-19 and concerns about the alpha variant of coronavirus, a stricter tier of restrictions, tier 4, was announced on 19 December. Tier 4 came into force at 7am on 20 December across London and large parts of the South East of England.

The tier 4 rules were broadly like those in place during the national lockdown in November. In tier 4 areas, people were required to stay at home unless they had a reasonable excuse to leave. All non-essential retail and hospitality businesses were closed (apart from click and collect, delivery and takeaway services) and people could only meet with one other person in certain public outdoor places.

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56 HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 26 November 2020
57 Ibid
58 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020
59 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2020
# England’s second tiered system (2 December 2020 to 4 January 2021)\textsuperscript{60}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Rule of six</th>
<th>Large gatherings</th>
<th>Opening hours</th>
<th>Alcohol sales restrictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Medium alert</td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>Those who organise gatherings of 30 or more people face higher penalties. Large events (elite sport, live performances) can operate at 50% capacity or up to 1,000/4,000 people indoors/outdoors (whichever is lower).</td>
<td>Hospitality venues must call last orders at 10pm and close by 11pm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indoor and outdoor gatherings of more than six people are prohibited unless exempt.</td>
<td>Household mixing</td>
<td>Large gatherings</td>
<td>Opening hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 High alert</td>
<td>People are prohibited from meeting those not part of their support bubble inside. People can meet up to six people outside.</td>
<td>Those who organise gatherings of 30 or more people face higher penalties. Large events can operate at 50% capacity or up to 1,000/2,000 people indoors/outdoors (whichever is lower).</td>
<td>Hospitality venues must call last orders at 10pm and close by 11pm.</td>
<td>Alcohol sales restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People are prohibited from meeting those not part of their support bubble inside. People can meet up to six people outside.</td>
<td>Household mixing</td>
<td>Large gatherings</td>
<td>Opening hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Very high alert</td>
<td>People are prohibited from meeting those not part of their support bubble inside. People can meet up to six people in outdoor public spaces (like parks).</td>
<td>Those who organise gatherings of 30 or more people face higher penalties. Large events are not permitted.</td>
<td>Hospitality must close but are permitted to operate via takeaway or delivery only.</td>
<td>Closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People are prohibited from leaving their home without a “reasonable excuse”.</td>
<td>Staying home</td>
<td>Social gatherings ban</td>
<td>Closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Stay at home</td>
<td>People are prohibited from meeting those not part of their household/support bubble inside. People can only meet one person from outside their household/support bubble in a public outdoor place. Those who organise gatherings of 30 or more people face higher penalties.</td>
<td>People are prohibited from meeting those not part of their household/support bubble inside. People can only meet one person from outside their household/support bubble in a public outdoor place. Those who organise gatherings of 30 or more people face higher penalties.</td>
<td>Hospitality must close but are permitted to operate via takeaway or delivery only.</td>
<td>Non-essential retail must close but are permitted to operate via click and collect or delivery only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\textsuperscript{60} The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020
4 Timeline

Disclaimer

This timeline lists the major events in the history of England’s lockdown laws. It does not attempt to provide a history of the UK Government’s whole approach to the coronavirus. It therefore does not include other coronavirus restrictions or Government action (self-isolation/face coverings/international travel), guidance, the vaccine programme or the Government’s support for businesses.

The Library has published a variety of research on the coronavirus. Other topics have been discussed elsewhere.

Every effort has been made to make this timeline comprehensive. If you spot an omission or mistake you can contact us via papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

4.1 March 2020

23 March: The Prime Minister addresses the nation and asks the public to stay at home. He says the police will have powers to issue fines to those who leave home without a reasonable excuse.⁶¹

26 March: The Government makes The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 (the first lockdown law) using powers in the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984. The first lockdown law gives legal effect to the Prime Minister’s address given three days earlier. The Government is initially required to review the need for restrictions every three weeks.

⁶¹ Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19), 23 March 2020
4.2 April 2020

16 April: The first official review of the lockdown takes place. The restrictions are maintained without major changes.62

21 April: The Government amends the first lockdown law. Most amendments are technical, but one is more substantial. The offence of “leaving the place where you are living” is amended so it is an offence to “leave or be outside of” the place you are living.63

4.3 May 2020

The Library published an Insight on parliamentary consent for the lockdown in England, ahead of the 4 May debate.

4 May: The House of Commons debates and approves the first lockdown law and its amendment regulation.64

7 May: The second official review of lockdown takes place. The Government announces the Prime Minister will make a statement on 10 May.65

10 May: The Prime Minister makes a televised statement and announced a “change in emphasis” to the UK Government’s guidance on work and exercise during the lockdown. He says that the Government will be “actively encouraging” those who cannot work from home to go to work from 13 May. He says people will be able to “take more and even unlimited amounts of outdoor exercise”. He also says the Government is planning to “increase the fines” for those who break the rules.66

12 May: New amendment regulations (the second amendment regulations) are made to England’s first lockdown law (to have effect from 13 May). These regulations:

- Amended the list of reasonable excuses to be outside to include recreational purposes.67

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62 Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Foreign Secretary’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19), 16 April 2020;
63 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (franked);
64 HC Deb, Public health, Volume 675, 4 May 2020
65 Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Foreign Secretary’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19), 7 May 2020
66 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, PM address to the nation on coronavirus, 10 May 2020
67 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
• Amended the text of the regulations to make it clear that people can meet one person from outside their household in open air spaces for recreation or exercise.\(^{68}\)

• Increased the fines associated with the Fixed Penalty Notices issued under the regulations. Fines for the first offence increased from £60 to £100 (reduced to £50 if paid within 14 days)\(^{69}\)

The first lockdown law did not need amending to allow people who could not work from home to return to work, as the regulations already provided for this.\(^{70}\)

**18 May:** The House of Commons approves the second amendment regulations.\(^{71}\)

**28 May:** The UK Government publishes England’s Covid-19 recovery strategy. The strategy sets out a “roadmap to lift restrictions step-by-step”. The strategy outlined three steps (England was already in step one) and gave indicative dates of when the Government expected the next steps to be reached. Moving through the steps was dependent on five tests being met:

1. The NHS must be able to provide “sufficient critical care and specialist treatment”.
2. There must be a “sustained and consistent fall in daily death rates”.
3. The infection rate must be “decreasing to manageable levels across the board”.
4. The Government must be confident that the “range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand”.
5. The Government must be confident that “any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak on infections that overwhelms the NHS”.

The Prime Minister holds a press conference and announces that the UK will begin moving into step two of the plan on 1 June. The new rules will allow people to meet outside, including in private gardens, in groups of up to six.\(^{72}\)

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\(^{68}\) \(\text{Reg}^{(3)}(a)(\text{iii}), \text{The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020}\)

\(^{69}\) \(\text{Reg}^{(4)}, \text{The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020}\)

\(^{70}\) \(\text{Reg}^{(2)}(f), \text{The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020}\)

\(^{71}\) Formal proceeding (votes and proceedings), \textit{Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020}, 18 May 2020

\(^{72}\) Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, \textit{PM press conference statement on the five tests}, 28 May 2020; see also: Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, \textit{PM: Six people can meet outside under new measures to ease lockdown}, 28 May 2020
31 May: regulations are made (to have effect from 1 June) which fundamentally amend the first lockdown law (the third amendment regulations). These regulations:

- Removed the prohibition on being outside without a “reasonable excuse” and replaced it with a requirement to have a “reasonable excuse” to stay overnight somewhere other than your home.73
- Changed the gatherings restriction to restrict indoor gatherings of two or more and outdoor gatherings of more than six. A list of exceptions to these rules allowed gatherings for work and education purposes (amongst other things).74
- Amended the relevant police powers. The police did not have the authority to remove people who are controvenering the requirement to stay overnight in their home, from where they were actually staying. They could not use force to break up a prohibited gathering taking place in private.75
- Changed the requirement to review the regulations every three weeks to every four weeks.76

The main effect of these changes was to shift the focus of the lockdown away from the former requirement to stay at home and towards the new restrictions on gatherings. While this shift gave people in England far more freedom of movement than they had previously, it still placed restrictions on their ability to gather socially, particularly indoors.

4.4

June 2020

9 June: The House of Commons approves the third amendment regulations to England’s first lockdown law.77

10 June: The Prime Minister delivers a press conference and announces that retail businesses will be permitted to reopen from 15 June and people who live alone or in single parent households would be able to form a ‘support bubble’

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75 [Regulation 12(8), The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2020](https://www.parliament.uk/laws/pdfs/202005/20200521-20200527-LordSG-2020-02241.pdf)
77 Formal proceeding (votes and proceedings), Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2020, 9 June 2020
with one other household. This completes England’s move through step two of the Covid-19 recovery strategy.

12 June: The Government amends the first lockdown law for the fourth time to give effect to the changes outlined by the Prime Minister two days earlier. The new amendments came into force on the 15 June.

23 June: Prime Minister gives a statement to the House of Commons announcing major changes to England’s lockdown. The statement is aligned to the fourth formal review of the lockdown law. This was the last time major changes to the first lockdown were announced following a formal review point of the laws.

The Prime Minister says that from 4 July, lockdown restrictions will be eased further (as anticipated in the Covid-19 recovery strategy). He says:

- Pubs, restaurants, hairdressers some leisure facilities and tourist attractions would be able to reopen.
- Two households would be able to meet indoors.
- “Staycations” in England would be permitted and “accommodation sites” in England would be reopened.
- Weddings with a maximum of thirty attendees would be permitted.

He goes on to say:

Our principle is to trust the British public to use their common sense in the full knowledge of the risks, remembering that the more we open up, the more vigilant we will need to be. From now on, we will ask people to follow guidance on social contact, instead of legislation.

29 June: Then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, makes a statement in the House Commons to announce that lockdown rules will not be relaxed in Leicester. This makes Leicester the first part of England to experience a “local lockdown”.

30 June: The House of Commons approves the fourth amendment regulations to England’s first lockdown law.

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78 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, PM statement at the coronavirus press conference, 10 June 2020
79 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2020
80 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, PM announces easing of lockdown restrictions, 23 June 2020; HC Deb, Covid-19 update, 23 June [volume 677, c1167-1170]
81 HC Deb, Covid-19 update, 23 June [volume 677, c1168]
82 HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 29 June 2020, [volume 678, c11]
83 Formal proceeding (votes and proceedings), Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2020, 30 June 2020
4.5

July 2020

3 July: New coronavirus restrictions regulations are made for England (England’s second lockdown law) that come into force the next day.⁸⁴ These regulations:

- Revoked the old regulations (and its amendment regulations).
- Introduced a new prohibition of gatherings of more than thirty people.
- Provided the UK Government with new powers to restrict access to public spaces.
- Provided the police with similar enforcement powers they had under the old regulations to enforce the new rules.

The new law effectively brought England into step three of its Covid-19 recovery strategy.

5 July: The UK Government makes local lockdown regulations for Leicester which keep the city under the rules that applied nationally on 3 July.⁸⁵

6 July: The High Court refuses an application for judicial review of an amended version of the first lockdown laws brought by Simon Dolan and Lauren Monks. The Court concludes that the laws “do not, even arguably” involve a breach of the right to private and family life.⁸⁶

16 July: The Government makes The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations 2020. The regulations will come into force on 18 July 2020. These regulations give English local authorities powers to make local lockdown restrictions.

25 July: The UK Government makes local lockdown regulations for Blackburn with Darwen and Luton.⁸⁷

4.6

August 2020

1 August: the UK Government revokes the local lockdown regulations for Blackburn with Darwen and makes new local lockdown regulations for Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford.⁸⁸

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⁸⁴ The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2020
⁸⁵ The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Leicester) Regulations 2020
⁸⁶ [2020] EWHC 1786 (Admin), para 118
⁸⁷ The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Blackburn with Darwen and Luton) Regulations 2020
⁸⁸ The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford) Regulations 2020
3 August: The UK Government replaces the local lockdown regulations for Leicester with new regulations. The city remains under extra lockdown restrictions.89

5 August: The UK Government makes local lockdown regulations for the North of England. The initial area they apply to includes Bolton, Greater Manchester, Stockport, Wigan and Burnley (among other areas).90

8 August: The local lockdown in the North of England is extended to cover Preston.91

18 August: The UK Government makes local lockdown regulations for the North East of England. Initially they apply to Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, Tyneside and Sunderland.92

23 August: The Home Office announces that people who organise large gatherings over the bank holiday weekend will face “tougher fines” including fines of £10,000 for those who organise “illegal raves”.93

26 August: The UK Government amends the local lockdown in Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford, so it applies to more of the surrounding areas.94

The UK Government removes Wigan and Rosendale from the local lockdown in the North of England.95

27 August: the UK Government amends the second national lockdown law to create a new offence of participating or organising an illegal rave during the pandemic. Those accused of this offence can be issued an FPN worth £10,000.96

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89 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Leicester) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
90 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions on Gatherings) (North of England) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
91 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions on Gatherings) (North of England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
92 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (North East of England) Regulations 2020
93 Home Office, Tougher fines ahead of Bank Holiday to crack down on illegal gatherings, 23 August 2020
94 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
95 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (North of England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
96 L2, The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions on Holding of Gatherings and Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020
4.7

September 2020

2 September: the UK Government amends the local lockdown in Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford to extend the area to which the restrictions apply again.97

The UK Government amends the area of the local lockdown in the North of England. Stockport, Hyndburn and Kirkles are removed. Batley and Dewsbury are added.98

3 September: The UK Government amends the area of the local lockdown in Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford again. Windhill and Wrose (a ward within Bradford) is removed.99

9 September: The Prime Minister delivers a press conference at Number 10 to announce the tightening of coronavirus restrictions for England. He says that from Monday 14 September a new “rule of six” would be introduced nationally prohibiting people from meeting socially in groups of more than six.100

10 September: Then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, makes a statement to the House of Commons providing more details about the new “rule of six”.101

The UK Government makes new local lockdown regulations for Bolton. Bolton is therefore removed from the North of England local lockdown.102

13 September: England’s second lockdown law is amended for the fourth time to put the rule of six into law. The change comes into force the next day.103

15 September: The UK Government makes new local lockdown regulations for Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull.104

21 September: The Chief Scientific Advisor and Chief Medical Officer for England give a press conference. They set out the latest data on the spread of

97 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
98 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (North of England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
99 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Blackburn with Darwen and Bradford) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
100 Prime Minister’s office, Number 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19), 9 September 2020
101 HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 10 September 2020
102 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Bolton) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
103 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2020
104 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
coronavirus and warned that “we are in a situation where numbers are clearly increasing. They’re increasing across all age groups.”

**22 September:** the Prime Minister gives a statement to the House of Commons announcing further changes to England’s lockdown laws. He says all pubs, bars and restaurants must operate table service only and close by 10pm.

The local lockdown regulations applying in Blackburn with Darwen and the surrounding areas are revoked.

The UK Government amends the area of the local lockdown in the North of England. Many areas are removed so it now only applies to Greater Manchester, Bury, Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees. Many of the areas that were under the rules imposed by the local lockdown for the North of England are moved into the regulations that had previously only applied to the North East of England.

The local lockdown in Birmingham is extended to apply in Wolverhampton.

**23 September:** England’s second lockdown law is amended for a fifth time to account for the new hospitality rules announced by the Prime Minister the previous day. The amendment regulations come into force the next day.

**26 September:** The local lockdown in the North of England is extended again to include Leeds. The local lockdown that originally applied in the North East of England is extended again to include Blackpool.

**30 September:** The House of Commons debates the first review of temporary provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020. During the debate, then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock confirmed that for “for significant national measures with effect in the whole of England or UK-wide” the Government would hold votes (wherever possible) before regulations come into force.

The areas in the North West, that are in the North East of England lockdown, are moved back to the North of England local lockdown. The North East of

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105 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Department of Health and Social Care, and Sir Patrick Vallance, Chief Scientific Advisor and Chief Medical Officer briefing on coronavirus (COVID-19), 21 September 2020
106 HC Deb, Covid-19, 22 September 2020
107 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Protected Areas and Linked Childcare Households) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
108 Ibid
109 Ibid
110 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) (Amendment) (No. 5) Regulations 2020
111 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Protected Areas and Restriction on Businesses) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
112 HC Deb, Coronavirus Act 2020 (Review of Temporary Provisions), 30 September 2020, c389
England regulations are changed again so they once again only apply to areas in the North East (Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, Tyneside and Sunderland).\textsuperscript{113}

4.8

October 2020

3 October: The UK Government changes the area of the North of England local lockdown again. Some areas are removed, Bolton is added.\textsuperscript{114} The local lockdown regulations that applied solely in Bolton are revoked now that Bolton is part of the North of England local lockdown.

The UK Government also changes the area of the North East of England local lockdown. It now once again includes some areas in the North West (Liverpool and surrounding areas). More areas in the North East are also added (Middlesbrough).\textsuperscript{115}

12 October: The Prime Minister makes a statement in the House of Commons saying the Government is “simplifying” local restrictions by introducing a three-tier system.\textsuperscript{116} A press release is also issued which sets out the tier allocations for the country. Liverpool is placed in tier three. Many areas in the North and West Midlands previously under local restrictions are in tier two, while the rest of the county is in tier one.

Regulations were made the same day to come into force on the 14 October which give legal effect to the Prime Minister’s announcement.\textsuperscript{117}

14 October: The new tier system regulations come into force (England’s third lockdown laws). The second lockdown law and all existing local lockdown regulations are revoked.

15 October: The Government announces that several areas including London, Essex and York will be moved into tier three on 17 October.\textsuperscript{118}

16 October: The Prime Minister holds a press conference. He says the Government has been trying to reach an agreement with the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, to move the region into tier three. He warns the

\textsuperscript{113} The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (North of England, North East and North West of England and Obligations of Undertakings (England) etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
\textsuperscript{114} The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (North of England and North East and North West of England etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
\textsuperscript{115} The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (North of England and North East and North West of England etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (revoked)
\textsuperscript{116} HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 12 October 2020
\textsuperscript{118} Department of Health and Social Care, Local COVID-19 alert level update, 15 October 2020
situation in Manchester is “grave” and urges the Mayor to “reconsider and engage constructively”.\(^{119}\)

**20 October:** The Prime Minister gives a press conference in which he announces that Greater Manchester will move to tier three on 24 October, without the agreement of the Mayor and other local leaders.\(^{120}\) The Mayor issues a statement saying the Government had at “no point” offered a support package for the poorest people in Manchester. He says he could not support the measures.\(^{121}\)

**22 October:** The Government announces that **Coventry, Slough and Stoke-on-Trent will move to tier three** on 24 October.\(^{122}\)

**23 October:** The Government announces that **South Yorkshire will also move to tier three** on 24 October.\(^{123}\)

**26 October:** The Government announces that **Warrington will move to tier three** on 27 October.\(^{124}\)

**28 October:** The Government announces that **Nottinghamshire will move to tier three** on 30 October.\(^{125}\)

**29 October:** The Government announces that from 31 October **more parts of England will move to tier three** including parts of Yorkshire, the West and East Midlands, Luton and Oxford.\(^{126}\)

**31 October:** the Prime Minister holds a press conference to announce a new national lockdown would be imposed from the 5 November. He says the lockdown will last until early December.\(^{127}\)

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\(^{119}\) Prime Minister’s office, Number 10 Downing Street, *Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19)*, 16 October 2020

\(^{120}\) Prime Minister’s office, Number 10 Downing Street, *Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19)*, 20 October 2020

\(^{121}\) GMCA, *Statement from the Mayor following talks with the Government on Tier 3 restrictions – Greater Manchester Combined Authority*, 20 October 2020

\(^{122}\) Department of Health and Social Care, *Local COVID alert level update: Coventry, Slough and Stoke-on-Trent*, 22 October 2020

\(^{123}\) Department of Health and Social Care, *Local COVID alert level update for South Yorkshire*, 23 October 2020

\(^{124}\) Department of Health and Social Care, *Local COVID alert level update for Warrington*, 26 October 2020

\(^{125}\) Department of Health and Social Care, *Local COVID alert level update for Nottinghamshire*, 28 October 2020

\(^{126}\) Department of Health and Social Care, *Local COVID alert level update: areas moving to 'high',* 29 October 2020

\(^{127}\) Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, *Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19)*, 31 October 2020
4.9

November 2020

2 November: The Prime Minister makes a statement to the House of Commons outlining further details of the new lockdown. He says the new lockdown will last until 2 December 2020.128

3 November: A new national lockdown law (England’s fourth lockdown law) is made to implement the lockdown. It will come into force on 5 November and will revoke the old tier system regulations.129

4 November: The House of Commons debates the fourth lockdown law and approves it.130

5 November: The fourth lockdown law comes into force and the England is back in “full lockdown” (although schools remain open).

23 November: The Prime Minister makes a statement in the House of Commons setting out the Government’s Covid-19 winter plan. The plan includes the reintroduction of a modified tiered system from the 2 December (following the planned end of the second national lockdown) and special measures for socialising during Christmas. The plan commits the Government to review the tiering allocations every 14 days.131

24 November 2020: The UK Government and the devolved administrations issue a press release explaining the plans to allow families and friends to meet at Christmas. It says that from the 23-27 December, up to three households can form an exclusive ‘Christmas bubble.’132

26 November: Matt Hancock announces the first tier allocations for England.133 Only Cornwall, the Isle of Scilly and the Isle of Wight are placed in tier one.134

30 November: The UK Government makes new regulations to bring the new tier system into force (England’s fifth lockdown law - the “All-Tiers Regulations”). The regulations will come into force from 2 December with the planned end of the second lockdown.135

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128 HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 2 November 2020
129 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2020
130 HC Deb, Public Health, 4 November 2020
131 HC Deb, Covid-19 Winter Plan, 23 November 2020
132 Cabinet Office, UK-wide Christmas arrangements agreed by the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations, 24 November 2020
133 HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 26 November 2020
134 Ibid
135 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020
December 2020

1 December: MPs debate and approve the All-Tiers Regulations.\textsuperscript{136}

2 December: The All-Tiers Regulations are brought into force.\textsuperscript{137}

14 December: Matt Hancock delivers a statement to the House of Commons confirming the Government has detected a new variant of the coronavirus in the South East of England (what would become known as the Alpha variant). He explains that cases are rising rapidly and says London and much of the South East of England will move to tier three restrictions on 16 December as a result.\textsuperscript{138}

17 December: Matt Hancock delivers the next formal tiering review. Most places stay in the same tier or are moved up, but Herefordshire is moved down to tier one and Bristol and North Somerset are moved down to tier two. The changes are effective from 19 December.\textsuperscript{139}

19 December: The Prime Minister, and the Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Medical officer, give a press conference in which they say urgent changes are needed to coronavirus restrictions.\textsuperscript{140} They announce a new “tier four” and say London, the South East and East of England will be placed in it the following day. Tier four rules are like those in place during the national lockdown in November.

Changes are also announced to the planned rules for Christmas period. The Prime Minister says there will now be no relaxation of rules in tier four areas during Christmas. He says Christmas bubbles will be allowed in tiers one, two and three but only for Christmas day itself.\textsuperscript{141}

23 December: Matt Hancock delivers a press conference to announce that from 26 December Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and most of Hampshire will be moved to tier four, Cheshire and Northamptonshire will move to tier three and Cornwall and Herefordshire will move to tier two. He

The Library published a briefing paper on the restrictions that were in place during Christmas 2020

\textsuperscript{136} HC Deb, Public Health, 1 December 2020
\textsuperscript{137} The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020
\textsuperscript{138} HC Deb, Covid-19 Update, 14 December 2020; Department of Health and Social Care, London, South Essex, and South Herefordshire to move to Tier 3 restrictions, 14 December 2020
\textsuperscript{139} Department of Health and Social Care, Oral statement on review of coronavirus tiering restrictions in England, 17 December; HCWS677, Covid-19: Tiers System, 17 December 2020
\textsuperscript{140} Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 19 December 2020
\textsuperscript{141} The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2020
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says rapidly rising infection rates mean they must make this decision ahead of the next formal tiering review (scheduled to take place on 30 December).  

30 December: Matt Hancock delivers the third tiering review and announces the approval of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. Rising infection rates mean most the country is placed in tier four. The changes come into effect the next day.

4.11 January 2021

4 January: The Prime Minister delivers a televised address to announce a third national lockdown for England.

5 January: Amendment regulations are made to the existing lockdown law (the All-Tiers Regulations- England’s fifth lockdown law) to give effect to the new national lockdown.

6 January: MPs are recalled early from Christmas recess to debate and approve the new national lockdown. The changes come into force at midnight on 6 January.

4.12 February 2021

22 February: The Prime Minister makes a statement to the House of Commons setting out a four-step plan for easing lockdown restrictions in England. The Government calls this the roadmap out of lockdown. He announces that the first step will take place in two phases and will begin on 8 March.

The roadmap sets out indicative dates by which the Government expects to move through the steps. However, moving through the roadmap is dependent on four tests:

1. The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.

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142 Department of Health and Social Care, Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus, 23 December 2020
143 HC Deb, Covid-19: Update, 30 December 2020; Department of Health and Social Care, Formal tiering review update, 30 December 2020
144 Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister announces national lockdown, 4 January 2021
145 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
146 HC Deb, Covid-19, 6 January 2020
147 C, The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
148 HC Deb, Covid-19: Road Map, 22 February 2021 [volume 689, c625-628]
2. Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
3. Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
4. Our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants of concern.

The Government says the plan may change if the tests are not met.

4.13 March 2021

5 March: The Government makes amendment regulations to the fifth lockdown law to initiate step one.149

8 March: The amendment regulations come into force and step one begins. People are permitted to leave home for recreation with their household and/or support bubble or with one person from outside their household.

12 March: The High Court considers an application for urgent interim relief by organisers of a vigil for Sarah Everard (a woman murdered days before by a serving police officer). The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) had refused to facilitate the vigil, citing that it would be unlawful under lockdown laws. In his judgement, Lord Justice Holgate agrees the police have a duty to consider the human rights of individuals when policing lockdown laws but does not make a determination as to whether protests were specifically legal under the third national lockdown law. Instead, he says the MPS and the vigil organisers should negotiate outside of court. The MPS maintains its position.

13 March: The vigil takes place without MPS approval. The policing of the vigil is heavily criticised in the press and by leading politicians. The Home Secretary, Priti Patel, orders an inspection of the MPS’s actions.

22 March: The Government makes new regulations for the rest of the steps out of lockdown (England’s sixth lockdown law: the “Roadmap Regulations”). These regulations will come into force on 29 March and will revoke the fifth lockdown law.150

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149 The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place and Restrictions: All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (revoked)
150 r23, The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021
The Library published a briefing ahead of the debate on the Roadmap Regulations and renewing parts of the Coronavirus Act.

**25 March:** MPs [debate the Roadmap Regulations](https://www.parliament.uk/business_committees/com_comdev/hc_debates) alongside the next six-monthly review of the temporary provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020. The Roadmap Regulations are approved. ¹⁵¹

**29 March:** The new Roadmap Regulations come into force and step one is complete. The stay-at-home order is lifted and the rule of six is reintroduced for outdoor settings. Outdoor sports facilities are permitted to reopen, and formally organised outdoor sport can recommence. A new international travel ban is introduced to prevent people leaving the country without a reasonable excuse.

**30 March:** Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) publishes its [inspection of the policing of Sarah Everard’s vigil](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-of-the-policing-of-the-sarah-everard-s-vigil). HMICFRS’ [press statement](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-of-the-policing-of-the-sarah-everard-s-vigil) says the Met was “justified in adopting the view that the risks of transmitting Covid-19 at the vigil were too great to ignore when planning for and policing the event”.

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### April 2021

**5 April:** The Prime Minister announced in [press conference](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/press-conference-on-coronavirus-updates-5-april-2021) that England will move to step two as planned on 12 April. ¹⁵²

**9 April:** The Government makes [amendment regulations](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/amendment-regulations-to-the-roadmap-regulations-which-will-move-england-into-step-two-rules-see-section-2-2-of-this-briefing) to the Roadmap Regulations which will move England into step two rules (see section 2.2 of this briefing). ¹⁵³

**12 April:** The amendment regulations come into force and England moves into step two of the roadmap. ¹⁵⁴


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¹⁵¹ HC Deb, [Coronavirus](https://www.parliament.uk/business_committees/com_comdev/hc_debates), 25 March 2021


¹⁵⁴ Ibid
4.15

May 2021

10 May: The Prime Minister issues a press statement confirming that the UK will move into step three as planned on 17 May.155

14 May: The Government makes amendment regulations to the Roadmap Regulations which will move England into step three rules.156

17 May: The amendment regulations come into force and England moves into step three of the roadmap. Restrictions on outdoor gatherings are relaxed to permit gatherings of up to 30 people. Indoors, the rule of six is applied. In addition, “the majority of the indoor and remaining outdoor economy” was permitted to reopen.157

The international travel ban is lifted. In its place a ‘traffic light’ system was introduced for international quarantine rules. Requirements on entry to the UK depended on the red, amber or green status of the country someone was entering from.

18 May: The amendment regulations that moved England into step two are approved by Parliament.158

4.16

June 2021

14 June: The Prime Minister announces in a press conference that the move to step four of the roadmap will be delayed by four weeks. He says the NHS needs “a few more crucial weeks” to meet a target of having two thirds of the adult population double vaccinated.159

16 June: The amendment regulations which brought England into step three are approved by Parliament.160

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155 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Further easing of COVID restrictions confirmed for 17 May, 10 May
156 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps and Other Provisions) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (revised)
157 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, Further easing of COVID restrictions confirmed for 17 May, 10 May 2021
159 Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, PM statement at coronavirus press conference, 14 June 2021
July 2021

12 July: The Prime Minister issues a press statement confirming England will move to step four of the roadmap on 19 July.\(^{161}\)

14 July: The Government makes revocation regulations for the Roadmap Regulations which will come into force at 11:55pm on 18 July.\(^{162}\)

18 July: The revocation amendments come into force and England moves into step four of the Government’s roadmap. This means there are no longer any lockdown laws in force in England, although other types of coronavirus restrictions still apply (notably self-isolation and international quarantine restrictions).

September 2021

15 September: Parliament approves the revocation amendments.\(^{163}\)

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\(^{161}\) Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, [Prime Minister confirms move to Step 4, 12 July](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-confirms-move-to-step-4)

\(^{162}\) The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps etc.) (England) (Revocation and Amendment) Regulations 2021

\(^{163}\) UK Parliament, Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps etc.) (England) (Revocation and Amendment) Regulations 2021: Timeline, undated
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